

10 SKILLS FOR EFFECTIVE TEAM PARENTING

1 Make your relationship with your child a top priority. In all your dealings with team members, focus on your commitment to build a healthy child/parent relationship. As you make day-to-day decisions, ask yourself what impact the decision will have on your relationship with your child. “I will skip playing basketball this afternoon even though I really want to because it is my scheduled time to be with my child, and I want her to know she can count on me.”

2 Be businesslike. If you and your child’s other parent— or other important team members — cannot be friends, treat them like colleagues that you must work with even if you don’t like them. Be cordial. Keep your feelings in check. Be orderly. Avoid making any assumptions — get clarification on everything. Use business-like communications. Don’t take the other person for granted. When you go to a team member’s home, act like you’re going into an important office to take care of some business. If problems occur, set up a meeting to try to resolve it. (Usually the worst time is when tempers are flaring.) “I’d like to find a time to talk with you about.... When would be good for you?”

3 Keep your child out of the middle. When issues come up between you and your child’s parent, keep it there. Do not say negative things to your child about his or her mother/father or the other team members. Don’t speak on the phone with such conversations when your child is in earshot. And by all means, don’t ask your child questions about his/her mother/father’s business. All parents have problems to solve or negotiate, but the child doesn’t need to be involved. “It’s important for you and me to work this out somewhere outside of our child’s hearing. Where would be convenient for you?”

4 Give compliments to team members. Frequently problems arise when people feel unappreciated. Make a habit of thanking people for what they do for your child. “I appreciate the way you get my child to school on time every morning before you go to work, even though it must be a huge hassle for you.”

5 Listen, listen, listen. In order to resolve problems, each party must listen to the other’s point of view. Your child’s mother/father is more likely to listen to your issues if they feel you listen to theirs. When he/she or anyone else on the team has an issue, make it your job to listen. When you think you understand, explain what you’ve heard. Don’t get into arguing or defending. Just listen first, then discuss. “I want to understand how this problem has affected you.”

6 Go ahead and apologize. When you’ve made a mistake, or not done something you said you’d do, simply apologize. Don’t give explanations or excuses. Simply apologize, and use a descriptive word that labels your behavior as wrong. “I’m sorry for being late to pick up our child and not calling ahead to let you know. It was very inconsiderate of me.” Taking full responsibility for your behavior will limit the amount of time the other person spends getting you to understand what you’ve done.

7 Make changes when necessary. If something you are doing is causing a real problem for the other parent, ask what you can do to reduce tensions. “What can I do to make this better? What can I do to help solve this problem?” If the request is reasonable, make the change. Just do it.

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8 Share your experience. If something the other person does is making it hard for you as a parent, explain what it is. Say it in a way that the person can hear. “When you say negative things to me in front of our child, I feel disrespected and embarrassed. It makes me want to stay away, and that’s not good for the child.”

9 Ask for what you want. When you want something from a team member, ask...don’t tell or demand. “I am scheduled to pick our child up this weekend, but my boss wants me to work overtime, and it would help me in my new job to say yes. Will it be all right for me to have him next weekend instead?”

10 Be a person of your word. Do what you say you’re going to do. Keep your promises, and be on time with all scheduled activities. If for some reason you can’t keep your word, call immediately and let the other person know. You create your own reputation by how you carry out your promises. As other team members see you being consistent in your actions, they will want to cooperate on your team.